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INDOCTRINATION AND "BRAIN WASHING"

UNDER

CHINESE COMMUNISTS

A Lesson in Communist Occupation Techniques

June 1951

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~~SECRET CONTROL/5.0. OFFICIALS ONLY~~ARRIVAL OF THE COMMUNIST TROOPS IN PEKING

3. When the Chinese Communists were laying siege to Peking late in 1948, a young Chinese named Chu Fan-chi (this is not his true name), a native of South China, was studying social sciences at Tsing Hua University. This was his freshman year, and he did part-time work to supplement the government scholarship which paid his tuition. Students with political interests were divided between the San Min Chu I group of pro-Kuomintang sympathies and the New Democracy group of the Communists, whose members were mainly underground. Chu belonged to the Communist group. "I was not," he says, "a Communist Party member, but I was an ardent Communist supporter, because I didn't like the Kuomintang regime and thought there had to be a change. I had no actual Party beliefs." He served the Communists by reporting Nationalist troop movements to a Communist classmate who had a link with the underground. Communist troops entered Peking on 6 January, and University classes stopped. The Communist students had orders not to reveal their identity immediately, but they gradually emerged to contest power with the San Min Chu I students, who were beginning to go underground. In the struggle that followed the Communists tried to break up the Nationalist group by persuasion, and when this failed some fights broke out. Chu and his associates tried to get the Nationalists arrested and sent to the Communist Army. The San Min Chu I group did not survive very long.

4. Meanwhile Chu was anxious "to help the people," and he found agreeable work among the Communist students in distributing American surplus food and medicine to the poor around Peking, who had suffered during the siege. But Communist officials who had just arrived said that this work must stop. Protests from Chu's relief group that the poor were suffering had no effect. The officials insisted that all medicines must be returned and no further distributions made of food or other supplies. "If the sick want to get better," they said, "they can do so by joining the Red Army." Chu and his friends tried to continue their relief work, but their pleas with sick farmers to join the army for treatment met with no success. The peasants had no desire to abandon their families, and one of them said, "If the government wants us to join the army to get cured, we would rather not be cured." Chu also did a stint in the People's Self-Defense Corps, whose members guarded the factories or places of business where they worked.

EDUCATION UNDER THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT

5. Officials of Tsing Hua University at first adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the different student groups, but this tolerance could not last. Within a few days the Communist youth, assisted by Communist faculty members, were in actual control of the University. For two months there were no classes, and Chu joined the holiday throngs

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welcoming the Communist Army, listening to speeches, and singing Communist Party songs. There was much praise for the "Elder Brother," as Stalin or Russia was called. Chu got a chance to make a speech over a loudspeaker. He shared the revolutionary enthusiasm which the well-disciplined Communist troops brought with them. The students returned to the University to find that the regular curriculum had disappeared along with all but 600 of the 2,500 students. Students, professors, and servants were assembled in a "Mobilization Meeting for Learning the New Democracy," and here a member of the Communist Committee for the University told them: "Mao's principles are the only ones that can bring about China's reconstruction. If you don't agree with Mao, you don't want China to become strong, and that means you are a personal-doctrine man (individualist)." Chu was able to make several remarks on the need for a strong China. But when the students were asked, after a long harangue, if they wanted to study the principles of the New Democracy and Mao Tse-tung's ideas, about a third said they did not, for they were technical students, engineers and the like, who had no desire to exchange their subject for politics. Nevertheless the reluctant minority was argued into silence. The chairman of the meeting was a member of the Communist Central Committee, North China Department, who had been appointed to look after political work in the University.

6. Classes were abolished, and to study the all-embracing subject of Communism the students were divided into groups of 23 with typical cellular organization: each group had a leader, an assistant leader, a culture-amusements chief, and a chief of education and propaganda. The groups, which included professors, students, and servants, were subdivided into sections of seven or eight students. Leaders of the various groups and sections were chosen by balloting on a single list of hand-picked candidates. This Communist-type organization operated under the Central Committee of the University. The period of holiday and celebration was over, and Chu sensed a cooling off among the students who had enthusiastically welcomed the Communists. There were no opposing votes, but numerous abstentions. One of the first actions of the group leaders was to examine their lists for persons with pro-Kuomintang sympathies, since these students would require special attention.

7. The group studies were completely orthodox in their Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist bias. Subjects included the history of society, the rise of capitalism, the theory of labor and revolution, with evil examples drawn from the U.S. and good from the U.S.S.R. The "correct" approach or interpretation filtered down from a Communist lecturer through the groups to the sections, where discussion took place. Chu was disappointed, like many other students, when he learned that "discussion" was a period in which students were encouraged to reveal their "incorrect" opinions for the benefit of the odd person, a silent observer, always present with notebook in hand. Otherwise real difference of opinion was not tolerated, and "dangerous" questions or views might leave a personal mark difficult to erase.

8. Chu's academic career was profoundly affected by some innocent well-meant remarks he made while trying to find out what foreign

intervention in China signified. During a discussion of American occupation of Tsingtao, he posted in the "wall newspaper" some questions about Russian occupation: why Russia, a peaceful country, dismantled Manchurian factories and took the machinery away after World War II; why it kept garrisons in Port Arthur and Dairen now that the war was over; why the Russians controlled the Manchurian railways. What was the difference, he asked, between American occupation of Tsingtao and Russian occupation of Dairen and Port Arthur? He soon learned that he had set the cat among the pigeons. Students showed great interest in these questions, and they were obviously not satisfied with the official answer that Russia was merely protecting the Chinese people from the Nationalists and from American aggression. The issue did not die at once, and the Central Committee member responsible for the University called Chu on the carpet for a personal talk. "Was it right to ask this question?" he asked. "Did you think about the consequences? How long has this idea been in your head? The effect," he added, "is to destroy the fruits of the revolution. This idea must have been in your head as a result of Kuomintang poison." He gave some helpful advice and suggested that Chu start a diary of his thoughts. He also took notes industriously while Chu, upon his request, talked about his childhood, the evolution of his ideas, and other personal matters. Thereafter he had Chu's section leader bring the diary in every few days for inspection, and Chu was required to turn over letters from his family, who fortunately wrote only of family affairs. "I believe," Chu says, "that about 400 of the 600 students in our university agreed with me. I feel sure that only a few agreed with the Communist Party's explanations on Manchuria.

9. Nearly all the students disliked the deadly routine and long hours of the new program, twelve hours a day for six days a week. When they complained to the authorities they were reminded that the People's Liberation Army suffered greater hardships. Only Party members tackled the grueling routine without complaint, but they numbered hardly more than 25. The students complained in three different petitions only to be told that they had been "fed with capitalist ideas and enjoyed life," with the usual remarks on the heroic Red troops. Though normal studies were resumed during the morning, the doctrinaire discussions continued for the rest of the day.

10. Chu continued his studies until the end of the summer. Then he and about 30 others received the disturbing news that they were being transferred immediately to a revolutionary university run by the Communist Party. When they made inquiries, they were told that they were regarded as "unreformable" in a non-party university such as Tsing Hua, which was run by the government. Therefore they were being transferred to the North China People's Revolutionary University.

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EDUCATION UNDER THE COMMUNIST PARTY

11. The People's Revolutionary University, only a few miles from Tsing Hua, was a former military training center under the Japanese occupation, with parade ground, barracks, and facilities for 10,000 troops. During Chu's stay there were almost 9,000 students, roughly 19 to 25 years of age, of whom one-fifth were girls living in separate barracks. "Bourgeois ideas of enjoyment" were discouraged. The students ate two scanty meals a day, lived in crowded barracks, and slept on the floor. There was considerable sickness and little medical attention. The Party insisted upon a Spartan routine under rigid Communist control. The University was under the North China Department of the Communist Party, and its Principal was a member of the Central Committee, a fat, stalwart type, six feet tall, who had fought as a guerrilla against the Japanese. One overall Study Department was responsible to the Principal for information on the students' "thoughts." The faculty (about a fourth were women) was divided into four functional departments: The first included students from other universities in need of "ideological reform"; the second trained intelligence personnel for the People's Liberation Army; the third was for members of liberal groups; and the fourth took care of Party members who stood accused of bungling their jobs or doing poor work.

12. The large classes were subdivided into groups of 23, where discussion was carried on. The twenty-fourth member was the instructor, whom the students referred to as "comrade" or "able Party member"; he was a Party member who did little teaching, but listened to the discussion, took notes, and settled disputed points. The procedure was for a Communist professor to give a lecture to the classes once a week; then the students broke up into groups for a week-long discussion. In this way there could be little straying from the Party line. If you did not join in the discussion, you were asked why you had no opinion, and the leader might accuse you of being "a lagging-behind particle", "without responsibility for the People's Revolution." Therefore all the students talked, but most of them, Chu believes, were as miserable and disappointed as he was. The theme was always political, and the Cominform newspaper published in Bucharest was a standard text. There were also labor duties such as farming plots, rebuilding walls, and repairing roads: this was called "reform by labor."

13. About 200 students were invited to witness "land reform" in a near-by village, and they did not forget the experience. A People's Court was trying the wife of a landlord who had escaped before the "liberation." Only about 20 of 250 farmers present stood up when the "able Party member" conducting the court asked those to do so "who had suffered most from her oppression." Before the trial was over the lone woman had been stripped naked and killed by the excited mob. Most of the farmers and even more of the women had quietly left before the final scene, which the students had to watch, sitting on the ground, "tense, silent except for intermittent sobs among our girls." Before

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leaving the village Chu saw a child crying over the woman's body. The trial was reviewed the following morning in a group discussion "with the coldness of a laboratory experiment." The "able Party member" who had led the court was criticized for "tailism" (or staying one step behind the mob), and the girl students who had wept were upbraided for "warm feelingism" and "not knowing your friends from your enemies." The whole episode made a deep impression, and many students sickened by the memory of what they had seen tried to avoid assignment to farm relief work. The Communists felt safer in sending them to Mongolia, since the Chinese regard Mongols as a different race.

14. Personal friendships were dangerous, and few developed. Students who were Party members adopted the role of keeping their status secret for two months, while they were gathering information on the others. Chu was avoided because of his notoriety for raising the Dairen and Port Arthur issue months earlier.

15. The "brain washing" technique in its most stringent form began under the guise of "idea training." The leaders would present a discussion topic such as "Idea Formation and Class Property," of which the students must make a complete analysis and report their own ideas. They were free to say anything they liked. In this way the University undertook an exhaustive inquiry into the views and attitudes of the whole student body. This began with a report from the students on their families, how they and their families lived, their education, their personal relationships, and the kind of life they preferred. After much checking the University announced that half the students, roughly 4,000, had "deep-set contradictions" in their lives. To discard their "evil past" the students must "confess"; they must "reveal their contradictory past to the public." Without confession of one's "bad past" there was no hope of becoming a "new man." Ample time was allowed the students during this inquisition. The intensity of the struggle "of new thoughts against old," Chu says, "can hardly be exaggerated." It went on incessantly. Men and women alike would break and weep under the constant probing of their "thoughts." If anyone spent a sleepless night brooding over his problems, some "friendly" person (actually a "thought seduction worker") would ask with an appearance of sympathy: "If you don't feel like revealing it in public, tell it to me." Students got their old reports back with instructions to re-write them to show the results of the "self-criticism" program. Several students saw no way out except to take their own lives, but to fail in the attempt was serious. One who failed was transferred to a college where "self-criticism" was even more strenuous: two-thirds of the time spent in labor, one-third in study.

16. There was always the danger, if you could not confess something, of being sent to the People's New Life Labor School, which was designed for "idea training": a minimum of six months of hard labor and hard study, and the course might be extended. Students recognized such

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schools as forced labor camps, and they were horrified at the thought of being sent to them, though that was the fate of 17 of Chu's classmates.

17. Married students were kept under pressure to divorce their mates, since Party work must separate them anyhow. Some women students were already mothers of "sons of the people." Only after about two months was any sexual freedom permitted: earlier the men and women had been kept apart. By the time Chu graduated about 17 girls were pregnant, but University officials refused permission for them to marry merely to satisfy a "feudal idea." Likewise sons were asked to cut off relations with their parents if the parents belonged to "the exploiting class." This was the iron test.

18. Chu refused to agree to abandon his parents for the Revolution. He was afraid they would starve. He continued to refuse after repeated requests. Finally the University sent someone to South China to see if they were as poor as he had described them. Meanwhile there was nothing he could do but promise further consideration and delay deciding the issue, postponing his decision to renounce his father and become "a son of the people" until graduation.

19. "This experience," Chu says, "completed my disappointment in Communism. I realized fully now that a Communist cares only for the Party's interests, and I understood now that the Revolution had been fought only for the profit of a particular political Party." The knowledge that his family was under police investigation "shook and shocked me." He decided to escape.

FINAL EXAMS AND GRADUATION

20. The "democratic examination" comprised an appearance before a committee of "positive elements of the student body and faculty." Chu himself was a member of a dozen such committees. There were no grades as such. The Students were graded only on their revolutionary reliability, and all decisions of committees must be unanimous. Then they were graduated, kept over, or sent to another "idea reform" institution. Chu barely squeezed through. He was regarded as "a backward element," "stubborn," and "not steady" in his political attitude and grasp of revolutionary principles (because he had overstressed his "personal situation" in refusing to cut off his parents). But his "positive attitude towards the working classes" got him through.

21. Armed with his graduation certificate, Chu was ordered to a distant province for duty; but he went instead to South China, assured himself that his parents were safe, and within a few weeks found refuge in Hong Kong.

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